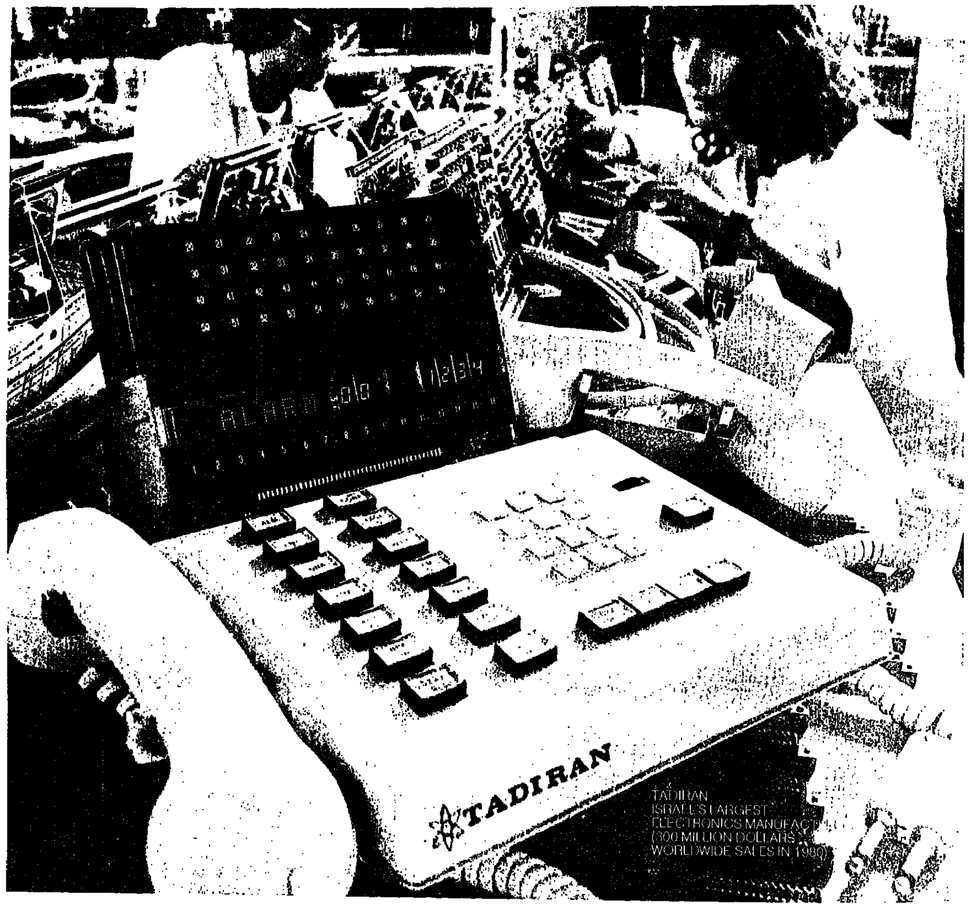

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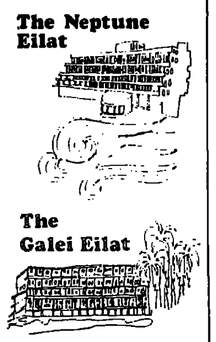

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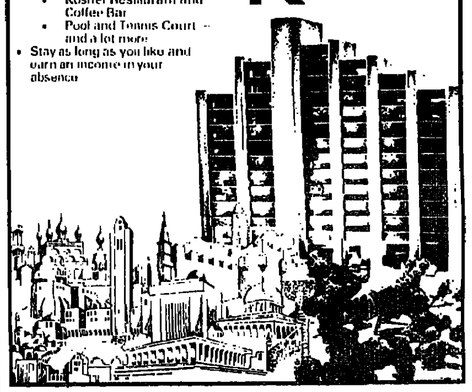

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HAIM SHAPIRO, The Jerusalem Post's travel writer, recently spent two weeks touring South Africa as guest of the South African Tourist Corporation (Satour), to gather material for this supplement.

The Zulu experience

Witch doctors, beer and grass skirts are part of life in the kraal.

JUST GO through that fence, said our guide, and someone will come to meet you. Sure enough, after we had gone only a few metres we heard singing behind us and a group of young Zulu women, wearing only short braided grass skirts, came up to lead us to the *kraal* (village).

When leaving Durban, I had assumed that I would see the staged folklore-for-the-tourists one usually experiences while travelling all over the world. Instead I found myself experiencing what is probably the closest real contact that a tourist can achieve in a one-day excursion.

Responsible for this minor miracle was Kingsley Holgate, a South African who grew up, he told us, speaking Zulu before he spoke English and who separated from his Zulu playmates only when he went to school. He met us in the village of Eshowe, a former Norwegian Mission station now the capital and administrative centre of Zululand.

The name of the village comes from the Zulu word for "wind in the trees" and recalls the fact that indigenous forest once covered the area. A small forest reserve is still one of the local attractions, as is an old fort containing a small collection of Zulu artifacts as well as articles from early white settlement in the region.

What the museum cannot convey is the great and brutal struggle that encompassed the region in the 19th century when the great Zulu kingdom of Chaka challenged and almost overcame the mighty British Empire.

But the iron spears, the woven baskets and the beaded head-dresses all arranged in cases, were no substitute for a meeting with the Zulus themselves. Men, in their traditional dress, greeted us at the entrance to the woven grass hut into which we were invited. According to Kingsley, many Zulus wear western clothing during the week but on Sunday, they put on their leopard skins and go off to a party or a wedding feast.

Grass huts are a perfect habitation. The fibres allow air to circulate, and in the rain they swell and become water-tight. There is no hole for the smoke of the fire in the centre of the hut to escape as the smoke serves to keep insects away. The floor is made from a mixture of cow manure and mud, smoothed over.

It is raising cattle, we learned, that constitutes the major economic activity of the Zulus. Land is owned in common, in the name of the king. Owning cattle is a sign of wealth. A wife might cost 12 cows — or more if she is already pregnant.

The atmosphere inside the Zulu hut was congenial and warm. Soon the men and women, seated on opposite sides, began to sing, accompanied by a drum and an intriguing instrument that sounded something like an electric guitar. The latter looked somewhat like an open-ended drum and had a small hole in its skin through which a small stick was placed, and held by a plug. The musician would first wet his hands and then gently stroke the stick as if he were milking a cow, producing a rich reverberating sound.

We were of course invited to taste the Zulu beer — a thick reddish brew, with a taste that might be compared to Guinness, but more concentrated. The beer, kept in a black clay pot, only lasts for a few days and it is a special occasion whenever anyone makes some. The gourd from which the beer is drunk is passed from the eldest to the youngest, with the men drinking before the women. We, too, in turn received the gourd, quaffing down the entire contents in one gulp.

With each helping of beer the singing became more melodious and gradually men, women and young girls rose to dance. One song, a new pop Zulu hit, is about the *m'bodice* (the brassiere) and whether or not it should be worn. Married Zulu women do cover their breasts with a square piece of animal skin, which allows easy access for a suckling baby. They also cover their hair, each tribal group with their own distinctive head-covering.

Among the women we saw, some had a beaded head-covering not unlike a beret. Another group had large, conical wool-and-wicker arrangements coloured with red ochre, a dye used for hair and face as well. Vastly different was the head-covering of yet another woman we saw at the *kraal*, a witch-doctor.

The title seemed perhaps a bit bombastic for the rather pleasant-looking young woman, with white braided strands hanging down all around her head. Her profession, we were told, is not one that precludes having a husband and children, but she definitely has a special place in the society — one that is a mixture of judge, psychiatrist, social worker and physician. Having passed a special training period, she is in a position to settle quarrels, solve problems and tender advice.

So great is the influence of the witch-doctors that they are often used by the police force.

This witch-doctor waited for us in her special hut and as each of us entered, we uttered a special invocation to the spirits and showed the palms of our hands to prove we had no weapons. She demonstrated a type of question-and-answer dialogue with those assembled that sounded very much like a revivalist sermon in the American South.

The smell of grilled meat soon announced that lunch was ready. We ate, sitting on the floor, from a wooden platter with only a wooden spoon as an implement. The meal consisted of steamed ground corn with a *cous cous* like consistency, cooked white beans and a special kind of local red bean, along with grilled steaks and home-made *boerewors*, the typical South African sausage.

Having had our fill of beer, we accepted an offer of tea, served in cups and saucers decorated with a willow pattern, with teaspoons and evaporated milk. It was this one concession to Western influence that brought home to us just how unique our experience had been.

Soon we were making our way back through the bush, again accompanied by singing girls who we felt we had come to know.

Back in the landrover which drove us around, Kingsley explained to us that a major economic activity in the *kraal* is its use in documentary film-making. This, he adds, is what makes it possible to take around small groups of tourists from time to time without destroying the authenticity of the site or interfering too much with the life of the people.

There are, in fact, a number of other, larger farms where visitors can come to see Zulu folklore in far greater comfort. No doubt many visitors to South Africa would prefer that kind of experience, but for the adventurous, this is probably the least "touristic" of travel experiences.

Kingsley Holgate can be contacted by writing: P.O.B. 103, Eshowe 3815, Zululand, South Africa.

Feathered friends

Ostriches—and Jews—flourish in Oudtshoorn.

WHAT do ostriches have to do with Jews?

Not much, unless you happen to come from Oudtshoorn, a settlement which boasts that it is the capital of the Little Karoo, one of the more arid parts of South Africa. According to its Jewish residents, Oudtshoorn is the "mother community" of South African Jewry, which was drawn there by the ostriches.

In the shadow of the mountains nearby, the ostriches roam about, much as cattle might in the American southwest. It was in the mid-19th century that farmers first thought of raising the ungainly birds commercially, but it was only at the beginning of this century that what the residents of Oudtshoorn still refer to as "the great feather boom" began.

By that time the Jewish ostrich farmers in the area were well entrenched. There was a Jewish community of over 500 with two synagogues. Jewish immigrants would come straight from Lithuania to the Little Karoo, and the town itself was known affectionately in Yiddish as *die kleine Yerushalayim*.

The feathers — the only part of the ostrich used in those days — were sent all over the world, providing the feather boas and trimmings that ruled the fashion of the times. Then fashions changed, the bottom dropped out of the feathers business and the farmers simply let the ostriches run loose.

Many of the Jewish settlers subsequently left and they and their descendants are to be found today all over South Africa, in Israel and throughout the world.

Today there are once again ostrich farms, albeit on a smaller scale than in the past. Now all the feathers of male and females are clipped, not just the fine, white wing-feathers of the male birds as in the past. And, in addition, everything else is used as well. Ostrich skin is made into a type of leather, the meat is dried as *biltong* — the dry, salty meat that South Africans love to chew on — and the bones are ground and used as fertilizer. Anything left is ground up and fed back to the ostriches.

The heritage of the feather boom can be seen in the town itself, with its ornate turn-of-the-century buildings, homes with turrets and ornate, wrought-iron trimmings, and in the imposing neo-Gothic churches with stained-glass windows, so unlike the severe Calvinist style prevalent elsewhere in the Dutch Reformed churches of South Africa.

There is also another relic of the feather boom: the hand-carved wooden interior of a late-19th century synagogue, which now graces a special room in the local museum. Painted white and gold, the ornate ark and matching *bima* are said to be replicas of earlier ones in Lithuania. But somehow, the rococo influence seems to have been too great for there to be no evidence left of the era of the feather boom.

ACCORDING to the members of the Jewish community, the decision to offer the synagogue to the museum came at a time when the number of Jews was dwindling. One synagogue was unused and falling into disrepair. The curators jumped at the offer, even though it meant removing one whole wall to get the ark in and lowering the floor and raising the ceiling so that it could fit in the room allotted for it.

The remaining synagogue is much less impressive. But the fact that the small community still holds a daily *minyan* speaks for the devotion of those who attend. There is also a school, a *mikva* and even a special room in which the women of the congregation prepare wine for Pesah.

Like many small Jewish enclaves, this one too has a spirit of hospitality that one does not find in the larger communities. And like other such communities, the members also display intense local pride — as well as a certain fear about the future of the community.

Every Jew who leaves is considered a direct loss. Every three or four years, a new rabbi is brought in from Israel, and is responsible not only for preaching and teaching, but for acting as *shohet* and *mohel*.

But, as in many places today, it is not only in the synagogue that one feels the spirit of the Jewish community. Rather in Oudtshoorn it is in the factories and shops and warehouses where light banter, friendly competition and easy camaraderie prevail. It is to be found in the Safari ostrich show farm, whose proprietor, Harry Lipschitz, lives in the adjacent stone "ostrich palace" that has been declared a national monument, where bus-loads of tourists come in daily to see ostrich races.

One tourist attraction that is not owned by Jews is the nearby Cango Caves which are owned by the municipality. Located along a mountain pass that in itself is quite impressive, the caves offer visitors not only several kilometres' walk through caverns of stalagtites and stalagmites, but also such amenities as a creche for infants and a kennel for dogs.

It was also at the restaurant of the caves that I had my opportunity to taste ostrich steak. There are those who say it is delicious. I would merely comment that it is interesting and rather chewy. Other attractions in the town include a game park and a crocodile farm.

For me it was enough to saunter along the main street in which giant shopping centres have not yet succeeded in eradicating the small-town spirit and atmosphere.

Oudtshoorn today represents but a small part of South Africa's Jewish community of 120,000, but for me it is a very special area to be remembered with fondness.

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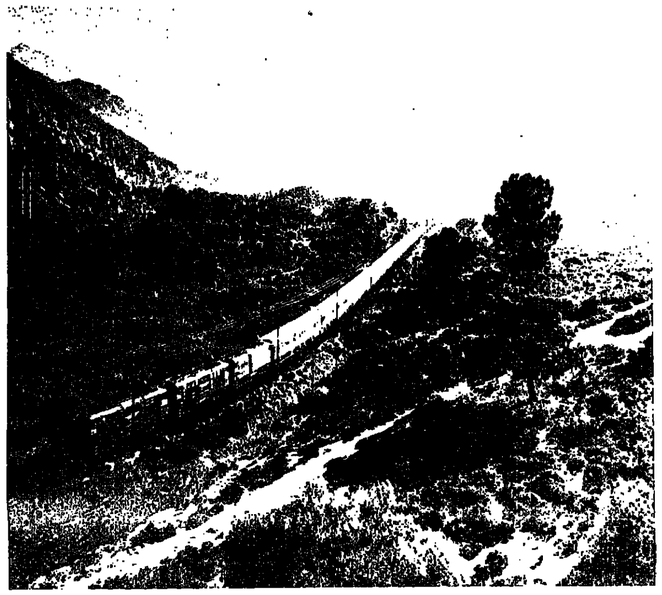

IF THERE was ever a legend associated with transportation in South Africa, it is the Blue Train — the height of luxury in a country in which "luxury" in tourism is a byword.

Admittedly, this train is not for everyone. In an age in which an airplane can transport one to a certain destination with the height of discomfort in little time, there are many who prefer speed to the utter comfort of a longer journey.

Nor is the fact that bookings are opened a year in advance for this train a factor likely to induce a harried traveller to try his or her luck in securing a place. Often the train is full. Some South Africans told me they had been trying to go on the Blue Train for years and had never succeeded.

But for the train buff in particular, the Blue Train is an experience one is likely to remember for a long time. This is travel the way it *ought* to be. And it seems to pay.

In a world in which passenger train service is becoming less and less frequent — and worse — the Blue Train is increasing its runs from two to three a week and officials are talking about adding yet another one.

The train itself goes from Pretoria in the north of the country to Cape Town in the south, a journey of about 25 hours. But most of the passengers go to or from Johannesburg, thus shortening the trip by about an hour. One of the many little extras making the train trip unique is that vehicles can be driven up onto the platform. One need only step a few metres to the train entrance.

Nor need you wonder about where you are to be seated on the train. A full list of passengers is posted on the platform, with their respective compartment numbers. The door of the compartment itself bears a little card with the passenger's name printed on it.

The first few minutes must, of necessity, be devoted to settling down, hanging one's coat in the little closet provided, stowing bags and suitcases under the seat and on the luggage shelf. Then one begins to "take in" the little extras.

A soft cushion is provided for your feet. A special dial provides music and radio programmes. Another switch automatically adjusts the heating and air-conditioning, and another works the venetian blinds on the window. And the amazing thing is — it all works!

We have all become conditioned to grimy old trains, bumping along — not only the few pitiful trains we have left for passengers in Israel, but some of the so-called "first class" trains of Europe and North America which look as if they are about to fall apart. Here, one could well be back in the days when going by train was still the main way of travelling, except of course that everything now is a little more mechanised.

Just as I settled down to have a look at the booklet written in English and Afrikaans, about the various cities and towns en route, and to enjoy the bottle of sparkling white wine so thoughtfully provided by the railways, the steward looked in, telling me to be sure to ring if I need anything. The shower is down the hall. Just ring and he'll provide bath towels.

ANOTHER feature is a little compartment next to the passageway where I can leave my shoes to be cleaned. The steward takes them out during the night and in the morning they are magically shiny and polished.

We are still rolling through the urban periphery of Johannesburg when the dining room steward makes his appearance. Having chosen the second sitting, I find that the scenery has changed considerably since the outset of the journey. Now, as I survey the nine-piece heavy silver service and glance over the wine list, I can look out the window and view the open expanse of the Karoo — golden brown brush and earth, with an occasional skeleton-like tree. Every so often we flash by a few buildings clustered together, race a car on a parallel highway or see a lone figure, waving at the train as it goes by.

People in Johannesburg warned me that this would be the boring part of the trip. "Take along a book," they told me. It is true the scenery is monotonous, but somehow it seemed far from boring.

The meal itself, a steady progression of course-upon-course, is hardly what one would describe as *haute cuisine*. It is more the heavy, solid food common to both English and Afrikaner South Africa. But in contrast to meals on most trains in the world, it is, if not exciting, at least well-cooked.

My dining companion is a retired engineer, now 82, who came to South Africa from England some 50 years ago. He is visiting his son and daughter-in-law and a new granddaughter in Cape Town. The last time he visited them, he says, they got a speeding ticket bringing him home from the airport. This time, he decided to take the train.

As the shadows lengthen over the Karoo, I have my afternoon nap. Then the steward brings the evening paper. I order tea, as much to see how quickly it will come, as because I am thirsty. As I expected, the tea comes within minutes, with teapot, milk, hot water and sugar all in their heavy silvery containers. Then it is time for a shower. The shower room is spotless, the water hot, the towel large and soft.

The evening meal is largely a repeat of the noon-time one, with fruit salad, fish and meat following in steady progression. This time, glutton that I am, I can barely eat my way through it all. In a mostly symbolic display of abstinence, I decide to forgo the rich creamy dessert. Only a bit of cheese with some biscuits help finish off my wine.

RETURNING to my compartment, now made up into a bedroom, I slip between the cool crisp sheets, lower the radio and take up my book. It is with difficulty that I turn off the light and the radio. The steady rhythm of the train is putting me to sleep.

Only once I wake up. I look at my watch, amazed to see that it is still evening. The train is standing in the station. Raising my blind I see, just across the tracks, another train filled with black people. Some are sitting down, but many are leaning out the windows, calling to friends, running back and forth, buying last minute drinks and snacks from the vendors pushing their carts up and down the platform.

Their train pulls out. One young man lingers on the platform and then with a show of bravado, swings aboard just as the train is gathering speed.

All is quiet and then our own train pulls out. Within a short time I am asleep again.

When I wake in the morning, we have left the golden brown solitude of the Karoo. The train is winding through a series of lush river valleys, surrounded by mountains. The impressive scenery is on the corridor side, and lazily I pull up the shade to the corridor and lie in bed watching it flash by. The steward, seeing I am awake, orders tea for me.

In the lounge car waiting to go into breakfast is a group of German tourists, all armed with cameras and busy snapping away at the mountains, the vineyards, the front of the train which we can see as we go around a curve. The view from the dining room itself is superb, with the sun steadily rising over the valleys, little houses, and fields of vegetables and vines, nestled in the shadow of the mountains.

Here there is no monotony. Each valley is different, every hill and mountain a new experience. It seems that I have hardly finished breakfast when I catch my first sight of Table Mountain, looming over Cape Town. Actually, it is a few minutes before I realize that this is, in fact the famed flat-topped mountain that indicates we have arrived in Cape Town.

Wearing my now gleaming shoes, I make my way off the train.

THOUGH certainly the most luxurious, the Blue Train is far from the only passenger train popular among tourists in South Africa. In a talk with Sarel Opperman of the South African Railways marketing department, I was told, that as the last country to use steam engines on regular train runs, South Africa is a haven for "steam" enthusiasts.

For them, the highlight is the annual Steam Safari when enthusiasts go out for 14 days of travel on steam trains, changing engines regularly. Opperman told me that popular as the safari is — with tourists coming in for it from all over the world, there are some fans of steam engines who shun it like the plague. They feel that the Steam Safari is a gimmick. For them, the real thrill lies in taking a regularly scheduled train that still uses a steam engine.

Some of these are the long overnight runs on which passengers pay separately for their bedding. In fact, the Blue Train is the only one in which the cost of bedding is included. On the others, if you prefer, you can bring your own.

One steam run, too short to call for bedding, is the Apple Express, a narrow-gauge train which brings the apples to Port Elizabeth from the mountains of the Eastern Cape. On this train, extra passenger cars are added during holiday months for the many people of all ages who enjoy making this day-long excursion, on what is only slightly bigger than a toy train, into the lush mountains of apple country.

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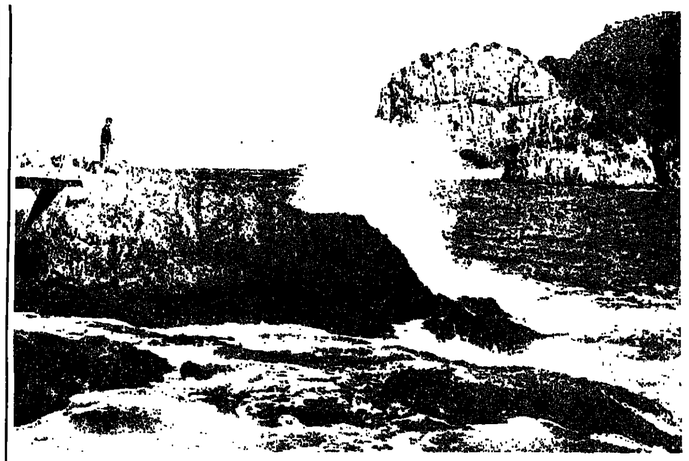
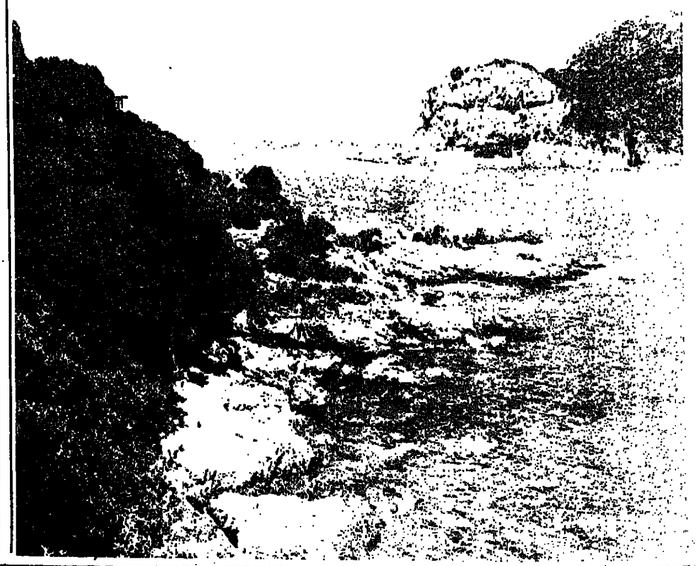


Garden of earthly delights

For those used to thinking of South Africa in terms of wildlife, the well tended greenery and broad beaches of the Garden Route, along the Eastern Cape, may come as a surprise. Here leisure-time activities may include surfing, boating, fishing and even hiking. The resort towns along the coast abound in small hotels, guest houses and holiday homes in which many local people spend their free time. Many such facilities are booked up during the local school holidays, but are available at bargain rates in the off-season.



Golden oldies

Become a gold-digger at Johannesburg's Gold Mine Museum.

GOLD is what it's all about.

That's what I learned at what is probably the only gold mine in the world which makes money by *not* mining gold: the Gold Mine Museum in Johannesburg.

The museum itself is located at the 14 Shaft, Crown Mines, where 1.4 million tons of gold were mined before it became uneconomical to work the shaft any longer.

Now, with guides in 19th-century dress and pianola music playing over loudspeakers, it is devoted to giving the public an idea of what mining was like in the "good old days." Guided by Jo — a knowledgable woman who, upon learning I was from Israel, told me that only a few days before she had attended a joint synagogue-church service in honour of Israel's Independence Day — I learned as much as I ever wanted to know about gold mining.

The tour began with a visit to a miner's cottage and then to an artisan's house. Much of the material on display, we learned, had been given to the museum by "Miss Emily," a 90-year-old woman who could not bear to throw anything away and finally found herself forced to part with such items as a stoneware water filter, a stuffed parrot and an old-fashioned water pitcher and basin, when she moved into an old peoples' home.

The objects dated from the period following 1886 when a prospector, George Harrison, discovered gold at an outcrop that is part of the Crown Mines property. The resulting gold rush led to the establishment of the city of Johannesburg.

The highlight of the visit was a descent into the mine-shaft.

After donning rubber boots, waterproofs and hard hats, we were shepherded into a cage by an amiable retired miner named Bert, who told us we would be missing much of the intense heat, pressure and dampness miners regularly experience at depths of up to 3,000 metres. We only went down to 225 metres below the surface, just to get a feeling for the place. As Bert pointed out, we also did not descend at the normal miner's rate of 15-metres-a-second — enough to "leave your body at the surface, when you're at the bottom."

I was unhappy to learn that gold is not simply picked out of rock in lumps. It is found in tiny particles in certain kinds of rocks. The rock is blasted out and taken to the surface. Meanwhile, water must be pumped out, the shaft walls must be propped up and the waste rock removed.

The main passages are whitewashed, not for aesthetic reasons, I learned, but because this makes it possible to see if there are any cracks developing.

We were treated to demonstrations of both today's power-drilling of the holes in which the dynamite is inserted, and of the old-fashioned, hand-hammering method. (We did not, however, witness a blast itself.) BERT, a robust 78, told us he was happy to be busy again. Retirement was all right the first year, he said, then he got restless. He told us that some half-a-million black Africans are recruited from South Africa and elsewhere in the continent to work in the mines for periods averaging nine months.

After a medical examination, workers are taken to the mines where they first spend a week learning Fanakalo, a mixture of English, Afrikaans and black African languages, which constitutes the lingua franca for a work force in which some 52 languages are spoken. After being given aptitude tests, they are assigned jobs. Today, Bert said, it is possible for a black African to become a supervisor.

Once at the top, we saw the giant lift mechanism which had lowered us down the shaft. Although the safety and braking mechanisms seemed impressive, we were happy not to go down again.

Then it was on to a demonstration of gold-casting from a white-hot crucible, with an armed guard standing by just to make sure no one became over-enthusiastic.

Incidentally, in addition to gold the mines also produce uranium, but there were no samples of that to be seen.

Both gold and uranium are now the object of residue-searching operations in the old mines' dumps. It was these dumps which for many years made life in Johannesburg less than ideal. Because of the cyanide used in the extraction process, no greenery grew on the dumps and dust was a regular part of life. Now the dumps are being foliated, I learned, with help by experts from Israel.

We had a close view of the vegetation on one of the dumps from yet another part of the museum — from the wooden third-class bench of a train pulled by a vintage steam engine. Finally, going back further in history, we visited the camp of a prospector, complete with tent, camp-fire and heavy iron weight for pulverizing gold-bearing rocks.

The prospector on hand came up with an impressive amount of gold sediments, but he freely admitted that his pan had been seeded with gold. I too, came up with an impressive amount — but my pan had been seeded with fool's gold.

Here the tour ended, and unfortunately, no samples were given out.

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On the Bible trail

THE GROUP was not a usual one for Ben-Gurion Airport — well-worn farmer types, many of them clutching their Bibles in their hands — but it was not an unusual group, I learned later, for the South African Airways flight between Ben-Gurion Airport and Johannesburg.

The passengers were members of a group of Afrikaaners who had come to visit Israel together with their minister. Often such people would tell me of their desire to see the land of the Bible. In fact, it was sometimes the only foreign country they were interested in seeing.

But others too had been in Israel or were planning to come. Young people would recount their experiences in kibbutzim where they had worked as volunteers and coloured South Africans too would talk of seeing the Holy Land.

For many of the Jews of South Africa, a visit to Israel seems to be something planned every few years, rather than a one time thing.

One of the leaders in organizing travel to Israel is, perhaps curiously, the South African Railways, which today include a wide network of travel services including the South African Airways and a chain of travel agencies. It is the latter, which have a firm hold in the Afrikaaner market, which are instrumental in organizing trips to Israel.

Glitter domes — Johannesburg lights up at night.

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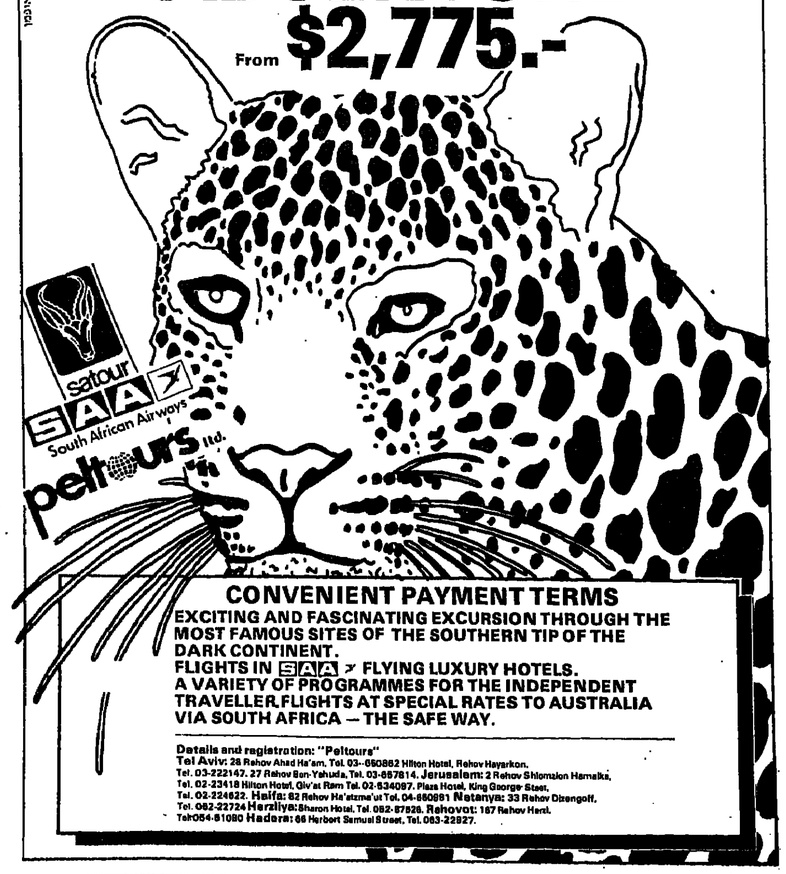

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A world in one country

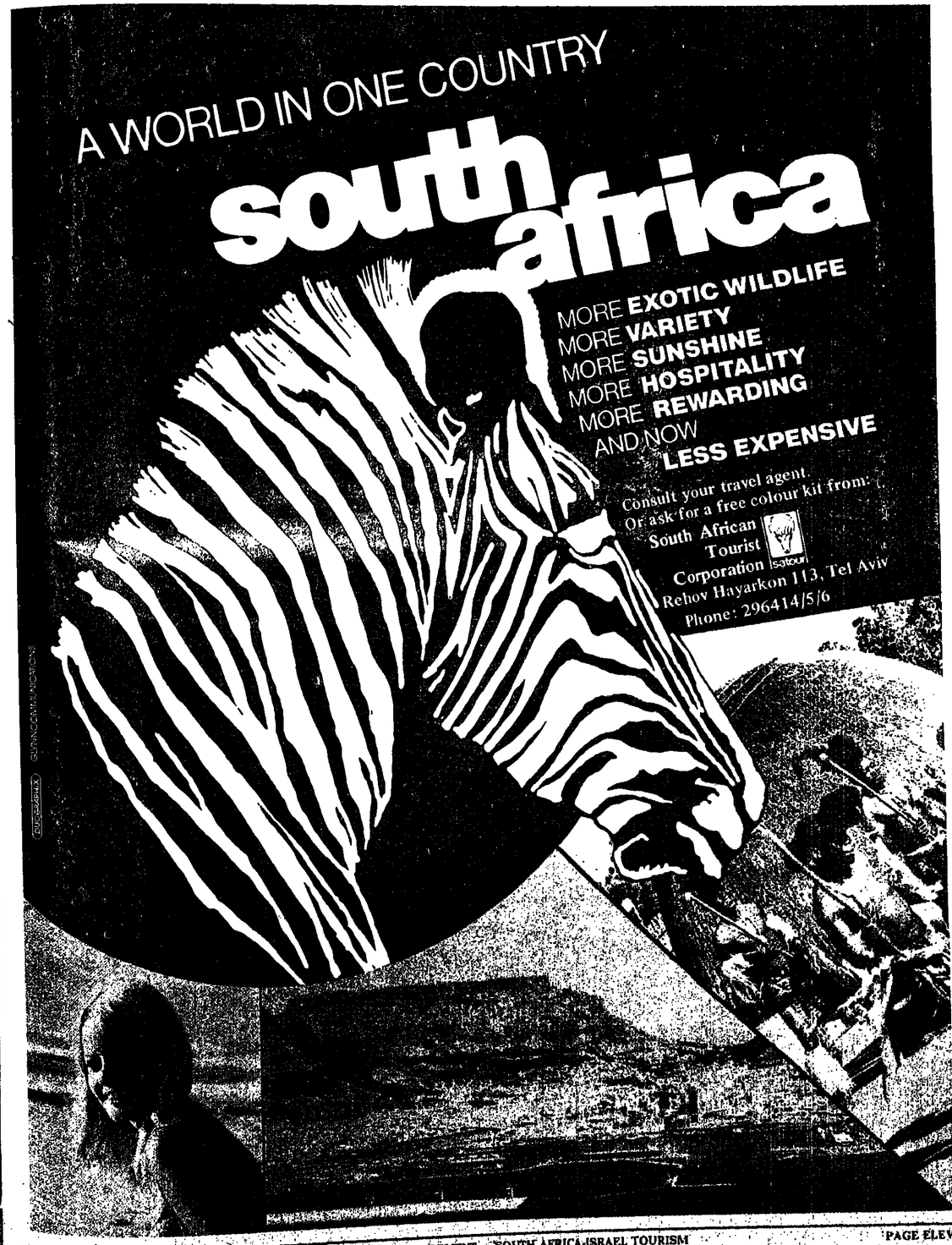
Special to the Jerusalem Post

PEOPLE seeking an exciting place for overseas travel come back after visiting South Africa marvelling at their varied experiences in "a whole world in one country."

What does South Africa offer? Beaches, nature reserves with rare animals, booming cities as well as agricultural communities, vast deserts, high waterfalls, a variety of architectural styles, and mines for gold, diamonds and other mineral wealth. The visitor there will also find historical museums, sports facilities, high-quality accommodation, efficient transportation services and — most important — very friendly people.

This reputation for friendliness also extends to the national airline, SAA, which offers excellent service. The company has installed only 240 seats in aircraft that, on other airlines, carry 370, making travelling very comfortable. Kosher food is available on the planes and there are three travel classes: first (Blue Diamond), on par with five-star standards; Golden Class, superior service at reasonable rates; and Silver Class, pleasant flying at low cost.

Arrangements can be made in Israel for flying SAA which make it possible for everyone to get to South Africa. This is the only airline which allows you to pay in 12 monthly instalments, in shekels, unlinked and at very low interest. And you can fly on to Australia after an enjoyable stay in South Africa, using the same payment plan.

In July, there will be a number of 22-day organized tours offered to South Africa and Zimbabwe. Those travelling will receive full board at first-class and tourist-class hotels. Further tours will be arranged later, and details are available at your travel agent or the offices of SAA at 5 Rehov Shalom Aleichem, Tel Aviv (Tel. 658388 or 657759).

A comparable holiday in Europe or the U.S. is usually much more expensive when taking into consideration SAA's special payment arrangements. Flights leave to Johannesburg from Lod every Tuesday. Maybe you'll be on the next one.